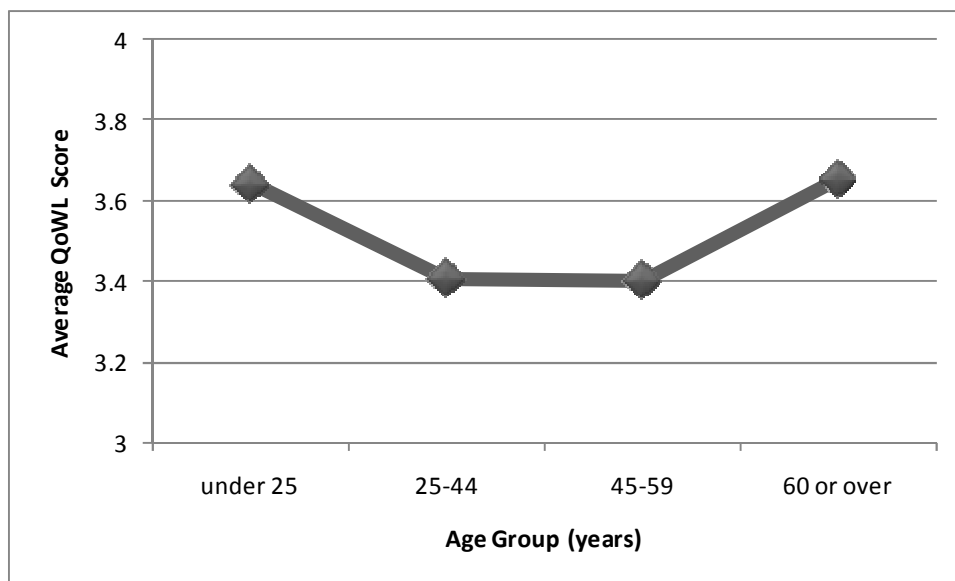


The Pre-retirement Bounce in Quality of Working Life for the over 60s

Recently, academic colleagues at the University of Portsmouth found something very interesting in our quality of working life data; evidence of a '**Pre-retirement Bounce**' in quality of working life. We found that UK university employees in the over 60 age group reported a significantly higher quality of working life than their middle-aged colleagues. But this Pre-retirement Bounce is more pronounced in men than women.

The analysis showed that quality of working life tended to be higher in the under 25 and in the 60 or over age groups, with the 25 to 59 year olds reporting the lowest quality of working life as measured by the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) scale. This pre-retirement bounce in quality of working life reflects a really positive change in the way the majority of the survey respondents felt about their work as they neared retirement.

The graph below shows the how quality of working life varies by age for all employees (male and female). Data comes from over 5,000 employees in 10 universities. The results for all staff indicate that employees are happier at work at either end of their working life.

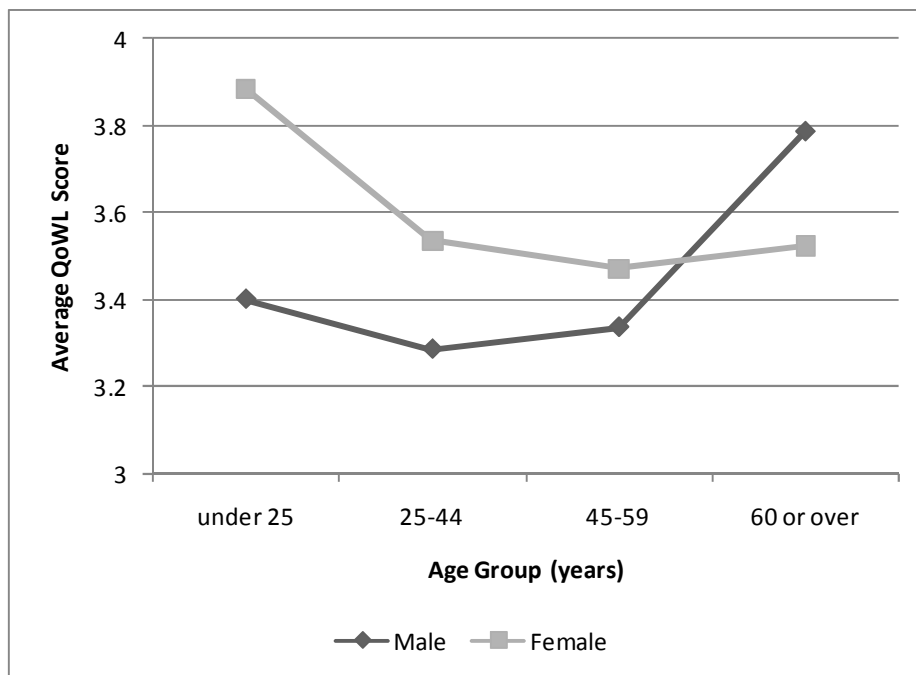


Gender Differences in the Pre-Retirement Bounce

However, the trends for men and women show interesting and highly significant differences.

Previous research has shown that women are generally happier than men at work. However, this research shows that as we get older the difference in happiness narrows. And the trends completely reverse at around age 60. At this age, men, with several years of working life still to go, seem to experience a notable increase in quality of working life. However, women, typically nearer to retirement at this age, report much less of an increase. Men, for the first time, have become much happier at work than women.

This graph below shows this very clearly. For most age groups females report much higher quality of working life, but at age 60+ the picture is completely reversed. As men approach retirement they get appreciably happier at work, while women feel only slightly better. Men therefore appear to have a much bigger 'pre-retirement bounce'.



Why might men experience a much stronger Pre-retirement Bounce?

The short answer is we don't know yet, but there are a number of interesting possibilities. We are having a look now at the results for the six quality of working life factors measured by our WRQoL scale to see if that sheds any light on the reasons. It might be related to the differing job roles occupied by men and women. Men may have roles that provide more flexibility and therefore are able to wind down more and reduce their stress. Men may typically have the prospect of a higher pension, which also provides more flexibility and options.

Alternatively, it may have something to do with gender differences in attitudes towards work and retirement. Men may look forward to retirement much more and see it as a 'blessed release', an opportunity to spend more time doing the things they like doing. Women, on the other hand, may value work for the social opportunities and networks it provides, rather than simply as a means of earning money. The prospect of more leisure time may not seem nearly as attractive to women, as they may see themselves as 'still working', but at home and in a different way. The prospect of more time at home with husbands may not be a cause of joy and happiness!

Implications of the Pre-retirement Bounce

The level of improvement in quality of working life is certainly interesting because it shows that satisfaction with work can improve. So it is worth exploring ways of making things better for all workers. Dr Darren Van Laar, Lead researcher at QoWL Ltd said; "While we are only now beginning to identify the factors that contribute to quality of working life, this research underlines the potential benefits that might be reaped from taking action to enhance the work environment and experience for all age groups".

This all becomes more than simply of academic interest when the trends are analysed more closely in the light of the planned increases in retirement ages. Men report little change in their quality of working life from 25 to 59 years. So it might be expected that a relatively small increase in their working lives due to later retirement ages will maybe just slightly delay that significant improvement in their quality of working life.

But for women, there seems to be more of a trend towards gradual lessening of their quality of working life through the age groups to later middle age. As women will experience a more substantial increase in the number of years they have to work before retirement, this trend might mean that older women experience further reduction in their quality of working life, and so end up less content in their pre-retirement years – missing out on the Pre-retirement bounce.

Background Information

These results were drawn from analysis of a sample of over 5000 University employees using the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL), which has been developed over the last decade by University of Portsmouth researchers.

QoWL research suggests there are 6 core factors affecting an individual's Quality of Working Life:

1. Job and Career Satisfaction (JCS),
2. General Well-Being (GWB),
3. Stress at Work (SAW),
4. Control at Work (CAW),
5. Home-Work Interface (HWI),
6. Working Conditions (WCS).

Initial analysis of survey results shows that men in the over 60 age group reported higher levels of satisfaction in each of these areas than women in that age range. We will be looking to see if the changes in retirement age do lead to lowering of reported quality of life, as well as working with employers to see why men see things so much more positively after 60. If we can identify the sources of that improvement for men, then we can help employers to ensure that women enjoy the Pre-retirement bounce too.

Alan Bradshaw, Director, QoWL Ltd

Contact information:

Tel: 08454 75 76 95

Mobile: 07947 127561

Email: alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk

Web: www.qowl.co.uk



About QoWL Ltd

QoWL Ltd is a University of Portsmouth spin out company. Using evidence based survey tools developed and tested during 15years of peer-reviewed research, QoWL helps organisations assess work-related stress, well-being and quality of working life.

Quality of Working Life is defined as a measure of how good your work is for you. It's more than just job satisfaction or work happiness, but the widest context in which an employee would evaluate their work environment. Quality of Working Life is assessed using the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) scale, a comprehensive measure of employee quality of working Life developed by Chartered Psychologists at the University of Portsmouth.

Company contact information:

Alan Bradshaw, Director, QoWL Ltd

Tel: 08454 75 76 95

Mobile: 07947 127561

Email: alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk

Web: www.qowl.co.uk

